

LINEAGE FORMATION AMONG THE LUO

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128 originate all the larger lineages which provide the political framework of Luo society.
114 My illustrations of Luo lineage structure are taken from material on one large
[613] lineage group, that of Karachuonyo. This group inhabits the present locations of
[24] Karachuonyo and Kasipul, and in 1947 had a population of 90,000. I lived here from
December 1946 till March 1947 and again for the month of September 1947. On each
occasion I took with me a Luo student from Makerere College as interpreter and
research assistant. I went through my material with a dozen or more of the Luo
students at Makerere who themselves came from a number of different locations.
Clearly, from such a short period in the field, my results are not complete, but in
so far as they add to the information at present available, I present them for what
they are worth. The map (Fig. 5) shows all the Luo locations of South Kavirondo,
those of the Karachuonyo group and of the other lineages which claim descent from
the common ancestors, Jook and his wife Awandu, being shown in heavy type.

III. THE FAMILY

[351] THE most prominent cultural features of the Luo landscape are the euphorbia hedges,
at stages of growth varying from that of 3-foot saplings to that of 30-foot trees,
592 dating each site by their planting at the time of first occupation, and throwing a thick
green wall round the cluster of huts within. This residential unit is the *dala* or *pacho*,
and will be referred to as the homestead. The dwelling-huts ranged in a circle round
the inside of the hedge are those of married women, the chief wife's hut being at
the side opposite to the entrance through the hedge, and the huts of subsequent
wives arranged in alternate succession on either side of that of the chief wife.¹ The
husband and head of the homestead divides his time between the huts of his wives,
the chief wife's hut taking precedence,² having no other quarters of his own except
an *abila*, a smaller hut usually in the centre of the circle, which was his only place
[784] of privacy. There is a belief that if the husband leaves the homestead to escape
from the bickering of his wives he will die on re-entering it, and the *abila* provides
him with a safer sanctuary. It was also a vantage point from which he could keep
a watchful eye on his cattle in the nearby kraal. The homestead is the spatial correlate
of the compound polygynous family and is subdivided into the households of its
component elementary families. Just as *dala* or *pacho* applies both figuratively to the
social group and concretely to the homestead occupied by it, so *ot* applies both to
house and to the household of wife and children occupying it. The title of the head
of the homestead and its family group is *mwon dala* or *mwon pacho*; *jadwong* (elder) may
be substituted for *mwon*. Correspondingly, each wife is *mwon ot*, signifying that she is
head of the household, proprietress of its hut and all other effects, and leader of
its domestic and economic activities. The word *mwon* is usually translated as 'father',
and is in fact the classificatory term for all agnates of the generation senior to the
speaker, including the 'genitor'. But its use with reference to all married women,

¹ See Gluckman in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, ed. Radcliffe-Brown and Forde. The Luo family has a 'house-property complex' of the Zulu type but in a less extreme form.

² This is often striking in ritual. The husband's most valuable possessions are also kept there. With

the present changes in hut design the chief wife's hut is often of the new and more pretentious rectangular pattern, while a second wife's may also be rectangular but smaller, and the third wife's still of the traditional circular type.

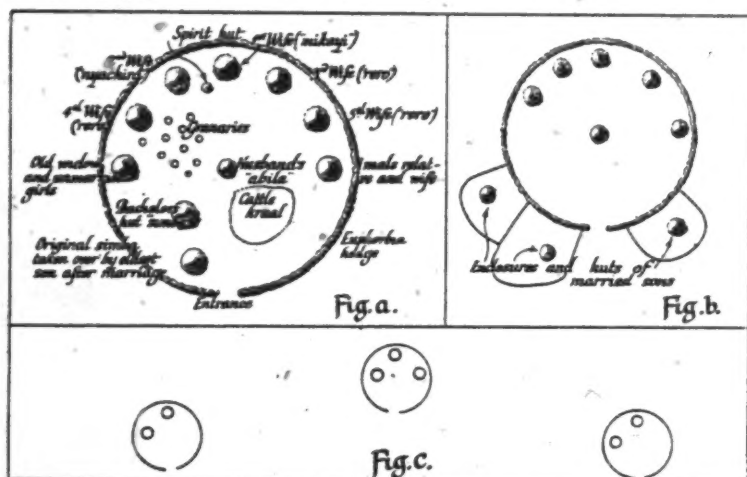
THE FAMILY

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and in a number of other sociological contexts, suggests that its primary meaning is that of owner.¹ The title of the first wife is *mikayi*, that of the second *nyashira*, and of all subsequent wives *rero*. 592

The diagrams below show the plan of the homestead at typical phases of the family cycle. The fuller details of Fig. a are omitted from the other figures. Taking the compound polygynous family as described above as an arbitrary point of departure, the cycle might be charted thus:

- PHASE 1. The compound polygynous family of husband, wives, and immature offspring. 541
 2. The eldest son matures, marries, and at first lives with his wife in the original bachelors' hut (*simba*) while his younger brothers build a new one next to it. 592
 (Fig. a).



3. The eldest son eventually builds his wife a hut of her own outside his father's homestead hedge. His younger brothers marry and follow suit. Offspring are born to them, bringing into existence the compound polygynous grand family. (Fig. b.)
 4. The sons marry subsidiary wives, gradually splitting off from the original homestead to form separate ones of their own. The head of the original homestead eventually dies, his widows are taken over by their stepsons or brothers-in-law, and the old homestead is in course of time deserted. There is now an extended family, with the eldest or ablest of the dead man's sons as head, the sons' homesteads now each having reached phase 1 of the cycle. (Fig. c.) 592 596

The head of the compound family is, of course, a member of each of its component elementary families, but the fact that he is common to them all gives each a certain independence in relation to him as well as to one another. The elementary family 592 595

¹ It is the possessive form of *swere* which has the meanings 'owner', 'father', 'greediness'.